

PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Newcastle Primary School and
Nursery Unit, Co Down

Report of an Inspection
in May 2012



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In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

BASIC INFORMATION SHEET (BIS) - PRIMARY SCHOOLS

- A. i. **School: Newcastle Primary** iii. **Date of Inspection: W/B 21/05/12**
 ii. **School Reference Number: 401-1698** iv. **Nature of Inspection: Focused**

B.

School Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Year 1 Intake	22	17	14	16	16
Enrolments					
Primary	139	126	121	122	113
Reception	0	0	0	0	0
Nursery Unit	52	52	52	52	52
Special Unit	0	0	0	0	0
Irish Medium Unit	0	0	0	0	0

The enrolment for the current year is the figure on the day of notification of inspection. For previous years it is the figure in the annual return to the Department of Education.

The calculations at C and D should be based on the total of the primary and reception enrolments only.

- C. Average Attendance for the Previous School Year (expressed as a percentage): 92.7% **NI Avg Att: 94.7%**
- Average Attendance for those children on the Special Educational Needs Register: 92.4%
- | | Primary & Reception | Nursery Unit | Special Unit | Irish Medium Unit |
|--|---------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|
|--|---------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|
- D. i. Number of Teachers (including the principal and part-time teachers): 8 1 0 0
 (Full-time equivalent = 25 teaching hours)
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 14.2 NI PTR: 20.2
- iii. Average Class Size: 16
- iv. Class Size (Range): 13 to 21
- v. Ancillary Support:
 Number of Hours **Per Week**:
- | | |
|---|----|
| i. Clerical support: | 25 |
| ii. Foundation Stage Classroom Assistant Support: | 15 |
| iii. Additional hours of other classroom assistant support: | 50 |
- vi. Percentage of children with statements of special educational needs: 4.42%
- vii. Total percentage of children on the Special Needs Register: 20.35%
- viii. Number of children who are **not** of statutory school age: 0
- ix. Percentage of children entitled to free school meals: 33.6%
- x. Percentage of children at the end of Key Stage 2 for 2010/11 who attained level 4 and above in English and mathematics, and Irish (in Irish-medium schools):
- | | | | | | |
|----------------|--------|--------------------|--------|--------------|-----|
| English | 78.94% | Mathematics | 78.94% | Irish | N/A |
|----------------|--------|--------------------|--------|--------------|-----|

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHOOL CONTEXT

Newcastle Primary School and Nursery Unit is situated on Shimna Road and celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. The majority of the children come from the town and the local area. The enrolment has decreased over the last three years and currently stands at 113 children in years 1 to 7, with a further 52 in the nursery. At the time of the inspection, approximately 34% of the children are entitled to free school meals (FSM). The school has identified approximately 20% of the children as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning.

1.2 FOCUS

The inspection focused on:

- the children's achievements and standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the quality of provision for learning; and
- the quality of leadership and management.

In addition, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning, and the school's arrangements for pastoral care, including child protection were evaluated.

1.3 THE VIEWS OF THE PARENTS, TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF, GOVERNORS, AND CHILDREN

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents and the teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the Board of Governors (governors) and a group of the children from year 6.

Eighty questionnaires were issued to the parents of children in the primary school; approximately 50% were returned to the Inspection Services Branch (ISB), and 20 included additional written comments. Fifty-two questionnaires were issued to the parents of children in the nursery unit; approximately 48% were returned to ISB, and 13 included additional written comments. Almost all of the responses to the questionnaires indicated a high level of satisfaction with the provision in the school and the nursery unit. In particular, the parents valued the supportive ethos; the dedicated and approachable staff; the wide range of after-school activities available to the children; and, the leadership of the Principal.

Eight of the teachers and nine members of the support staff completed the confidential online questionnaire. Almost all of the responses were positive about all aspects of the work of the school. The respondents appreciated, in particular, the team ethos and the opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process. The governors commended the dedication of all of the staff. They paid particular tribute to the work of the recently-appointed Principal for her leadership and, in particular, her commitment to further school improvement.

The children in year 6 spoke positively about the friendly atmosphere in the school, the helpful teachers and the wide range of extra-curricular activities. They indicated that they felt safe in the school and were fully aware of what to do if they had any concerns regarding their work, safety or well-being.

The analysis of the questionnaires, and the written comments made by the parents and staff, were shared with the Principal and governors.

1.4 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care is good. The nursery and primary school have a welcoming, inclusive ethos and the working relationships at all levels are very good. The staff is committed to the care and welfare of the children. Reward systems are operated well by the individual teachers, and an active school council promotes effectively the children's personal and social development. The children participate enthusiastically in a range of extra-curricular activities which enhances their learning experiences.

1.5 CHILD PROTECTION

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school and nursery had satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. The arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE). There is a need to update aspects of safeguarding provision, including training arrangements for staff.

1.6 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school and the nursery give very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the nursery unit's break routine and the outdoor physical play activities, which promote well the children's understanding of healthy lifestyles.

1.7 LINKS WITH PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The nursery unit has very good links with the local community. These links, notably with the lifeboat station and local businesses, are strongly focused on supporting the children's learning. The school has good sporting links with other primary schools in the area and a strong working relationship with the local outdoor education centre. The parent support group provides financial assistance to buy, for example, reading and play resources for the school and nursery unit. The parents are well informed through regular newsletters, the school's website and information evenings.

2. **ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

2.1 LEARNING

During the inspection the children's behaviour in the nursery unit and primary school was very good. The children co-operated well with each other, displayed a clear sense of enjoyment and most completed their work to a good and often very good standard.

An analysis of the key stage (KS) 2 assessment data shows that the school's performance in English and mathematics is good. In English, in three of the last four years the performance has risen and been above the Northern Ireland (NI) average and the average for schools in the same free school meals category. The school's performance in mathematics has fluctuated more over the same period, from just below to above the NI average and the average for schools in the same free school meals category. The children attain good standards in the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment's ICT Accreditation scheme.

2.2 ENGLISH AND LITERACY

The overall quality of provision in English is good.

The recently-appointed literacy co-ordinator has identified appropriate areas for the development of literacy which are set well within the school development plan (SDP). She liaised with an officer from the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) on the implementation of a whole-school phonological programme, and she prioritised appropriately the planning for progression in literacy across the year groups as an area for improvement. This focus includes, importantly, the need to match the activities and support in class more closely to the varying needs and abilities of all of the children.

The staff in the nursery unit employs a variety of strategies which extends the children's spoken language well through good quality interactions, including thoughtful questioning and the modelling of appropriate vocabulary in context. At all key stages, a variety of well-planned opportunities for the children to work and interact with others, including drama-based activities, develops effectively their thinking, talking and listening skills which are of a good standard. Almost all of the children work well in pairs and small groups.

Most of the children read at a level corresponding with, or above, their chronological age. In the nursery unit, the children develop good early language skills through accessing the very good range of topic books available. In the foundation stage (FS) and KS1, there is a systematic programme for the teaching of reading. In all the year groups, the children benefit from a balanced reading programme which includes shared, modelled, guided and independent reading. Most of the children read with fluency and expression. A small number of children who benefit from an additional reading partnership programme made significant progress. Accordingly, the school needs to consider ways to extend this provision to more children who require additional support in reading.

Most of the children attain good to very good standards in their writing. In the nursery unit, most of the children show a developing interest in experimental writing and know that print carries meaning. While the children in the FS are encouraged to "have a go" at spelling unfamiliar words in literacy lessons, the opportunities for writing in activity-based learning are too limited and, accordingly, this should have a greater focus in the teachers' planning and practice. In KS1 and KS2, in most classes, there are frequent opportunities to write for a range of purposes and audiences, including diary entries, recounts, instructions, newspaper articles and different forms of poetry.

2.3 MATHEMATICS AND NUMERACY

The quality of provision for mathematics and numeracy is good.

The recently-appointed mathematics co-ordinator provides effective guidance and has a clear vision for the future development of mathematics. This includes, appropriately, the further improvement of the good standards being reached.

The whole-school planning for mathematics provides useful guidance for the teaching of all areas of the mathematics curriculum. The co-ordinator is currently taking forward important aspects of the planning in order to ensure that the planned programme is more closely matched to the children's varying needs and abilities and indicates more clearly the progression in learning expected. The inspection findings endorse this important improvement work.

All of the children in the primary school experience a good range of mathematical experiences across number, shape and space, measures and data-handling. They use practical equipment where appropriate and, in the best practice, in most classes, employ mathematics in a real life context to develop their understanding of key mathematical processes. They develop well the appropriate mathematical language associated with key aspects of measures and money. Mental mathematics sessions of a very good quality were observed in most of the classes. The teachers need to plan for and implement a more frequent use of ICT to support the children's work.

In a majority of classes, the teachers use a wide range of strategies to elicit extended responses from the children both in whole-class teaching and in group work. In a significant minority of classes, the teachers plan well for and provide a wide range of activities closely matched to the children's widely varying needs and abilities. As a direct result, the children develop their use of mathematical language well and they experience a high and realistic degree of challenge. This very good practice, however, needs to be disseminated to all the classes and this is a key area for improvement.

The staff in the nursery unit uses a good range of appropriate mathematical language when supporting the children's free play and more structured activities. As a result, most of the children show a good early awareness of counting, sorting and talking about size, shape and position. While play-based activities are used in the FS and early KS1 to develop the children's ability to sort, match, count, recognise and create patterns, the potential of play-based activities is generally underdeveloped within the school's mathematics programme.

Overall, the standards achieved by the children in mathematics are good. Most of the children achieve good and better standards in number, shape, measures and data-handling.

3. THE QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 PLANNING

Early in the first term, the school appropriately identified the need to update the planning across the curriculum and the year groups. As a consequence, the co-ordinators and teachers implemented revised formats for weekly and half-termly plans which provided practical guidance for teaching and learning. The school needs now to improve further this planning by including in greater detail how to meet the needs of all of the children, in particular those who have difficulty with aspects of their learning

3.2 TEACHING

The teaching observed during the inspection ranged from outstanding to satisfactory. Most of the lessons were good or satisfactory, almost in equal proportion. A minority were outstanding.

In the very good practice observed, the teachers: had appropriately high and realistic expectations and provided work well matched to the children's abilities; employed a wide range of strategies, including the effective use of ICT; made clear the intended learning along with associated success criteria; and, promoted well the children's oral and thinking skills. Where the practice was less effective, the work proceeded at too slow a pace and there was insufficient challenge or variation in the teaching strategies to cater for the different abilities of the children.

3.3 ASSESSMENT

The effective analysis of performance data, including standardised tests and benchmarking information, to track the children's progress is at an early stage. The new Principal and literacy and numeracy co-ordinators have played a key role in developing this necessary work.

The teachers mark the children's work regularly and positively. In the best practice, the teachers' oral and written comments indicate clearly how the work can be improved. The parents are well informed about the children's progress through an annual written report and biannual interviews.

3.4 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The overall quality of the provision for special educational needs is satisfactory.

The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has identified in the school development plan the need to review and update the provision; the inspection endorses this focus as a priority for the school. While there are individual education plans (IEPs) for all of the children on the SEN register, the targets and strategies to support their progress are not consistently sharply focused on improving standards. The school is now beginning to use quantitative data more rigorously to evaluate the effectiveness of its SEN arrangements; this is an immediate and important priority.

The classroom assistants provide good support in class and in the reading partnership programme. The school now needs to consider how best to deploy them, within its budget, to work more effectively to raise further the standards attained by the children who require additional help.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 LEADERSHIP

The overall quality of leadership and management in the school is good.

The Principal took up her post during this school year. She took decisive, immediate and needed action to identify and begin to work on appropriate areas for improvement, including those also identified by this inspection. As part of this work she and the governors appointed a number of curricular and pastoral co-ordinators, where important posts were unfilled, and they updated essential whole-school policies. She communicated successfully to all members of staff and the governors her vision for further school improvement. Integral to the success of her work so far is the very good internal communication and her open, collegial approach to school improvement. Much effective work was completed in a very short space of time and this is a noteworthy feature of the leadership and management arrangements.

4.2 PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Principal promotes well an ethos of self-evaluation and reflection within the school and ensures that the staff is fully involved in decision making. The school development plan (SDP) identifies appropriate areas for improvement and is underpinned by purposeful action plans which are well focused on improving the standards attained by the children. The SDP now requires adjustment in light of the inspection findings.

4.3 RESOURCES, FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The governors are well informed about the school's provision. They manage the finances efficiently to support the children's education and to meet the priorities identified in the SDP.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The strengths of the school include:

- the well-mannered and courteous children who engage fully in their learning;
- the good standards attained by the children in literacy, numeracy and ICT;
- the inclusive ethos, characterised by the very good working relationships at all levels;
- the supportive, approachable staff and the good work of the recently-appointed co-ordinators; and
- the effective leadership of the Principal, characterised by her collegial approach to school improvement.

5.2 The areas for improvement include the need to:

- disseminate the good practice in teaching and learning more effectively in order to raise further the standards attained by the children; and
- improve the planning and provision for SEN, including the use of performance data, to focus more sharply on meeting the needs of all of the children.

5.3 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the school's progress on these areas for improvement.

6. THE NURSERY UNIT

6.1 The main strengths within the nursery unit are as follows:

- the warm, welcoming and inclusive learning environment which supports well the needs of all of the children;
- the very good quality of the pastoral care provision, including the high priority given to the social and emotional development of the children;
- the rich, broad and balanced planned programme which takes very good account of individual children's needs and interests;
- the good or better quality staff interactions which promote well the children's developing language, thinking skills and independence; and
- the systematic team approach to the regular evaluation of all aspects of the playgroup's provision.

6.2 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this nursery unit is very good. The nursery unit is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the children; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON NEWCASTLE PRIMARY SCHOOL NURSERY UNIT

1. Details of Children

Number of children:	Class 1	Class 2
Attending full-time	0	0
Attending part-time	26	26
Under 3 years of age*	9	12
With statement of SEN**	0	0
At CoP stages 3 or 4***	1	0
At CoP stages 1 or 2***	0	0
With English as an additional language	0	2

* On 1 July.

** Special Educational Needs.

*** The stages refer to those set out in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.

Percentage qualifying under DE admission criteria 1 or 2.	1.92%
Average attendance for the previous year.	88.7%

2. Duration of Sessions

Full-time	Part-time: am	Part-time: pm
-	2½ hours	2½ hours

3. Details of Staff

	Full-Time	Part-Time
Teachers	1	0
Nursery Assistants (qualified)	1	0
Nursery Assistants (non-qualified)	0	0

Number of: ****	
Students	1
Trainees	0

**** Total placements since September of current year

4. Parental Questionnaires

Number issued	52
Percentage returned	48%
Number of written comments	13

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